

## A SUMMARY OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN THE REFORMED TRADITION

*(based on the Westminster Shorter Catechism of 1649 A.D.)*

**Q. 1. What is the ultimate purpose of human life?**

A. Our ultimate purpose is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

**Q. 2. What guidance has God given us to glorify and enjoy Him?**

A. The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are the Word of God and are the only unfailing guide to glorifying and enjoying Him.

**Q. 3. What do the Scriptures teach?**

A. The Scriptures teach us what to believe about God, and what God requires of us.

**Q. 4. Who is God?**

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

**Q. 5. How many Gods are there?**

A. There is only One — the living and true God.

**Q. 6. How many Persons are there in God?**

A. There are three Persons in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one God, the same in substance, co-eternal, and co-equal in power and glory.

**Q. 7. What are the “decrees” of God?**

A. The “decrees” of God are an inescapable consequence of His omniscience (all-knowingness) and omnipotence (all-powerfulness) by which, of necessity, all things must proceed from His will and whereby, for His own glory, He has determined everything, both good and bad, that will take place; in accordance with His secret counsel and conducive to His eternal purpose. God’s decrees do not abolish man’s capacity of free-will, nor that of the angels, but rather establishes them in full knowledge of their outcome in every case, exercising almighty power to rule above and through all things, in perfect righteousness and wisdom, to dispose them to His glory and the Elect, without fail, to eternal salvation.

**Q. 8. How does God implement His decrees?**

A. God implements His decrees through His creative power and providence.

**Q. 9. What is God’s creative power?**

A. God’s creative power is that which brought all things into existence out of nothing, by the word which He spoke.

**Q. 10. How did God create humankind?**

A. God created us male and female, in His own image, and endowed us with knowledge and goodness, and gave us power over all other creatures on earth.

**Q. 11. What is God’s providence?**

A. God’s providence is His power exercised to provide, preserve, and govern all creation.

**Q. 12. What special act of providence did God exercise for humanity, in the condition in which they were first created?**

A. When God created humankind, He entered into a covenant of life with them by promising to preserve their lives if they obeyed His command not to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, otherwise they would die.

**Q. 13. Did our first parents obey God’s command?**

A. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, being left to the freedom of their own wills, fell from the condition in which they were first created and sinned against God.

**Q. 14. What is sin?**

A. Sin is the transgression of God’s commandments.

**Q. 15. What was the sin by which our first parents fell from their original condition?**

A. Adam and Eve fell from their original condition by transgressing God’s command not to eat of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

**Q. 16. Did all of humanity also fall with Adam and Eve in their transgression?**

A. God’s covenant of life was made with Adam and Eve and, as our first parents, also with all those who would descend from them by ordinary generation; and so all of humanity fell with them through their first sin.

**Q. 17. What happened to the human race as a result of the Fall?**

A. The Fall exposed the human race to the disappointment, pain, and misery caused by sin.

**Q. 18. What effects came upon the human race as a result of the sinfulness of the Fall?**

A. The sinfulness of the Fall caused all of humanity to become tainted by the guilt of Adam and Eve's first sin and it corrupted human nature by spoiling its original righteousness. This guilt and corruption is commonly called "original sin" and is the motive force for all the actual transgressions which have proceeded from it.

**Q. 19. What misery came upon the human race as a result of the Fall?**

A. All of humanity, by the fall of our first parents, lost their spiritual communion with God and became subjected to God's anger and curse and were thereby consigned to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and finally to the punishment of hell forever.

**Q. 20. Did God leave mankind to perish in this sin and misery?**

A. God, in His infinite mercy and grace surpassing our understanding, and by the secret council of His will, determined to deliver His Elect from their sin and misery, and bring them to salvation and everlasting life through a Redeemer.

**Q. 21. Who is the Redeemer of God's Elect?**

A. The Redeemer of God's Elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, who became man and continues forever to be both God and man in one Person, having two distinct natures which may be distinguished but are nonetheless inseparable.

**Q. 22. How did Christ, being the Son of God, become man?**

A. Christ, the eternal Son of God, became man by assuming a human body and soul, being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, yet without sin.

**Q. 23. What offices does Christ fulfill as our Redeemer?**

A. Christ, as our Redeemer, fulfills the offices of prophet, priest, and king, both in the humble state of His earthly life and in the exalted state of His resurrected glory.

**Q. 24. How does Christ fulfill the office of a prophet?**

A. Christ fulfills the office of a prophet by revealing the will of God to us by His Word and Spirit.

**Q. 25. How does Christ fulfill the office of a priest?**

A. Christ fulfills the office of a priest by offering Himself as the sacrifice for our sins and reconciling us to God by satisfying the demands of God's justice. He also serves as our high priest by making continual intercession on our behalf before God the Father.

**Q. 26. How does Christ fulfill the office of a king?**

A. Christ fulfills the office of a king by asserting His rule over us and defending us by restraining and conquering all His enemies and ours.

**Q. 27. How did Christ suffer humiliation?**

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in being born into human life, in a lowly condition, in undergoing the miseries of this life, and especially by enduring the wrath of God for sinners by the cursed death of the cross, and by being buried and continuing under the power of death for a time.

**Q. 28. How was Christ brought to exaltation?**

A. Christ's was brought to exaltation by rising from the dead on the third day and ascending into heaven where He sits at the right hand of God the Father until He comes again in glory to judge the living and the dead at the last day.

**Q. 29. How are we made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ?**

A. We are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ through the effective application of it to us by the Holy Spirit.

**Q. 30. How does the Holy Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?**

A. The Holy Spirit applies to us the redemption purchased by Christ by creating faith in our hearts and uniting us to Christ in our effective calling.

**Q. 31. What is effective calling?**

A. Effective calling is the work of God's Spirit to convict us of sin and enlighten us to the love of Christ and, by renewing our wills, persuading and enabling us to embrace Jesus Christ and His salvation which are freely offered to all in the gospel.

**Q. 32. What benefits do those who are effectively called receive in this life?**

A. Those who are effectively called receive in this life justification and sanctification, and the benefits which accompany and flow from them.

**Q. 33. What is justification?**

A. Justification is an act of God's grace by which He forgives our sins and declares us to be righteous in His sight through the righteousness of Christ which is attributed to us in this amazing gift of God which is received by faith. Through justification, we are irrevocably welcomed into eternal life and given all

the privileges of the children of God.

**Q. 34. What is sanctification?**

A. Sanctification is the work of God's grace, in which we are spiritually renewed in the image of God and are enabled more and more to die to sin and live for righteousness.

**Q. 35. What are the benefits which accompany justification and sanctification in this life?**

A. The benefits which accompany justification and sanctification in this life are the inner assurance of God's love, a spiritual peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Spirit, and the power to persevere in the grace of God to the end.

**Q. 36. What benefits do believers receive from Christ upon their death?**

A. Upon their death, the souls of believers are made perfect in holiness, and enter into glory; and their bodies, being still united to Christ and accounted as precious to Him, rest in their graves until the day of resurrection.

**Q. 37. What benefits do believers receive from Christ at the resurrection?**

A. At the resurrection, believers are raised up in glory and openly acquitted in the Day of Judgment, and are made perfectly whole and blessed in the full enjoyment of God for all eternity.

**Q. 38. What is the duty that God requires of every human being?**

A. The duty that God requires of every human being is obedience to His revealed will.

**Q. 39. What did God first reveal as His will to be obeyed?**

A. The rule which God first revealed as His will to be obeyed was the moral law.

**Q. 40. Where is the moral law summarized?**

A. The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments.

**Q. 41. How did Jesus summarize the Ten Commandments?**

A. Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments as follows: the greatest commandment, He said, was "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind." And the second, He said, is like it, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

**Q. 42. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?**

A. The preface to the Ten Commandments is: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

**Q. 43. What does this teach us?**

A. The preface teaches us that God is our Savior and Lord, and for this reason we owe Him our obedience in keeping His commandments.

**Q. 44. What is the First Commandment?**

A. "You shall have no other gods before Me."

**Q. 45. What is required by the First Commandment?**

A. The First Commandment requires us to acknowledge God's existence, to seek to know Him, to worship and glorify Him, and to serve Him as our highest priority.

**Q. 46. What is forbidden by the First Commandment?**

A. The First Commandment forbids denying God's existence, or failing to worship and glorify Him as the only true God, or worshipping or glorifying any god but Him alone.

**Q. 47. What are we specially taught by the words, "before Me," in the First Commandment?**

A. The words, "before Me," teach us that Almighty God, who sees all, takes notice of, and is provoked to anger by the sin of having any other god.

**Q. 48. What is the Second Commandment?**

A. "You shall not make for yourself any engraved image, or likeness of any thing in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters upon the earth, to bow down before them or serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon their children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me; and showing mercy to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments."

**Q. 49. What is required by the Second Commandment?**

A. The Second Commandment requires us to acknowledge, obey, and to keep pure and complete all the ordinances of worship that God has given us in His Word.

**Q. 50. What is forbidden by the Second Commandment?**

A. The Second Commandment forbids the worshiping of God by images, the worship of any other god but God alone, and forbids us to create or define for ourselves our own god and thereby provoke God to wrath through unrestrained audacity and arrogance.

**Q. 51. What are the reasons connected with the Second Commandment?**

A. The reasons connected with the Second Commandment are God's absolute right, as our Creator, to rule over us, and His loving concern for us that we acknowledge the True Source of all life and existence, lest, in depending upon any false god that cannot save, we harm ourselves or be deprived of our birthright blessing as children of God.

**Q. 52. Which is the Third Commandment?**

A. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain: for the Lord will not account them guiltless who take His name in vain."

**Q. 53. What is required by the Third Commandment?**

A. The Third Commandment requires the respectful and reverent use of God's name, titles, attributes, and word.

**Q. 54. What is forbidden in the Third Commandment?**

A. The Third Commandment forbids the irreverent use of God's name, or of anything whereby God makes Himself known.

**Q. 55. What is the reason connected with the Third Commandment?**

A. The reason connected with the Third Commandment is that even if breakers of this commandment should escape punishment in this life, the Lord our God will not allow them to escape in the final judgment.

**Q. 56. What is the Fourth Commandment?**

A. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God: in it you shall not do any work, not you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your servants, nor your farm animals, nor the visitor staying in your home: because in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and everything in them and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy."

**Q. 57. What is required by the Fourth Commandment?**

A. The Fourth Commandment requires us to keep holy one day in seven as a day of rest.

**Q. 58. Which day has God appointed to be kept as the Sabbath?**

A. From the beginning of creation until the time of Christ, God set apart the seventh day of the week in commemoration of creation. Since the time of Christ, by the authority of the apostles, the first day of the week has been observed as the Christian Sabbath, in honor of the resurrection of Christ and our re-creation and rebirth in His grace.

**Q. 59. How is the Sabbath to be observed?**

A. The Sabbath is to be observed as a day of rest from the cares and labors of worldly employment, except for what work must be done to ensure public health and safety. It is also a day set aside for the worship of God, for refreshment and re-creation of body and mind, and for the renewal of family ties.

**Q. 60. What, in addition to working on the Sabbath, is forbidden by the Fourth Commandment?**

A. The Fourth Commandment also forbids the neglect of work or duties required of us in commanding us to work six days as well as resting on the seventh.

**Q. 61. What are the reasons connected with the Fourth Commandment?**

A. The reasons connected with the Fourth Commandment are God's own example in creating the world in six days and resting on the seventh and instituting the Sabbath of rest for our physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

**Q. 62. What is the Fifth Commandment?**

A. "Honor your father and your mother so that your days may be long upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

**Q. 63. What is required by the Fifth Commandment?**

A. The Fifth Commandment requires us to honor and respect our parents and elders, and also those in authority, according to their offices, to maintain civility in public discourse and debate, and accord all persons the respect which is due to all human beings.

**Q. 64. What is forbidden by the Fifth Commandment?**

A. The Fifth Commandment forbids the dishonoring or disrespecting of parents, elders, and those in authority, and also forbids the use of dishonest means or personal attack in the furtherance of objectives or ambitions in any context, short of war.

**Q. 65. What is the reason connected with the Fifth Commandment?**

A. The reason connected with the Fifth Commandment is a promise of long and happy life, as far as it shall serve God's glory, to all those who keep this commandment.

**Q. 66. What is the Sixth Commandment?**

A. "You shall not kill."

**Q. 67. What is required by the Sixth Commandment?**

A. The Sixth Commandment requires us to seek to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

**Q. 68. What is forbidden by the Sixth Commandment?**

A. The Sixth Commandment forbids murder and whatsoever tends to sickness and danger to ourselves and others.

**Q. 69. What is the Seventh Commandment?**

A. "You shall not commit adultery."

**Q. 70. What is required by the Seventh Commandment?**

A. The Seventh Commandment requires us to respect and preserve marriage through purity of heart, speech, and behavior, and the devotion expressed in vows of marriage.

**Q. 71. What is forbidden by the Seventh Commandment?**

A. The Seventh Commandment forbids all impure thoughts, words, and actions.

**Q. 72. What is the Eighth Commandment?**

A. "You shall not steal."

**Q. 73. What is required by the Eighth Commandment?**

A. The Eighth Commandment requires us to promote the lawful furthering of wealth and prosperity for ourselves and others.

**Q. 74. What is forbidden by the Eighth Commandment?**

A. The Eighth Commandment forbids whatever causes harm and tends toward the impoverishment of ourselves and others.

**Q. 75. What is the Ninth Commandment?**

A. "You shall not testify falsely against your neighbor."

**Q. 76. What is required by the Ninth Commandment?**

A. The Ninth Commandment requires us to be truthful in our speech and conduct, especially when bearing testimony or in entering legal contracts and agreements. It also requires us to promote truthfulness in society, and to preserve our own reputation and that of our neighbors and defend them when they are libeled or slandered.

**Q. 77. What is forbidden by the Ninth Commandment?**

A. The Ninth Commandment forbids whatever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name.

**Q. 78. What is the Tenth Commandment?**

A. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his servants, nor his livestock, nor any thing that is your neighbor's."

**Q. 79. What is required by the Tenth Commandment?**

A. The Tenth Commandment requires us to be content in our worldly condition and to have a right and charitable attitude toward our neighbor and all that he has.

**Q. 80. What is forbidden by the Tenth Commandment?**

A. The Tenth Commandment forbids all envying and begrudging the good fortune of our neighbor, and all the destructive thoughts and words that are born of envy.

**Q. 81. Is anyone able to perfectly keep God's commandments?**

A. No person, since the Fall of Adam & Eve is able to perfectly keep the commandments of God, but daily breaks them, in thoughts, words, and deeds.

**Q. 82. Are all transgressions of the law equally bad?**

A. No. Some sins are in themselves, or by reason of several aggravating factors, more evil in the sight of God than others.

**Q. 83. What does every sin deserve?**

A. Every sin is deserving of God's anger and judgment.

**Q. 84. How may we escape God's anger and the judgment that we, as sinners, deserve?**

A. To escape God's anger and judgment, God requires us to repent of our sins, have faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and our Savior, and make use of the means of grace.

**Q. 85. What is faith in Jesus Christ?**

A. Faith in Jesus Christ is a gift from God which enables us to accept His offer of forgiveness, according to the gospel, and trust in Him alone for our salvation.

**Q. 86. What does it mean to repent of our sins?**

A. Repentance is a gift of God's grace which touches us with a sense of guilt for our sins and makes us to feel sorrow for them and also enables us to recognize the hope contained in the mercy of God. Repentance causes us to hate our sins and struggle against them, seeking the power of God in prayer to overcome them for His glory.

**Q. 87. What are the means of grace?**

A. The means of grace are the God-given ways to spiritual renewal. They are the Word of God, the Sacraments, and prayer which are effective to the Elect for their salvation.

**Q. 88. How is the Word made effective for the salvation of the Elect?**

A. The Holy Spirit of God opens the minds and hearts of the Elect as they attend to the reading and preaching of the Word of God and furnishes a power to convince and convert sinners and renew them in holiness and comfort, through faith, to their salvation.

**Q. 89. How is the Word of God to be received?**

A. The Word of God is to be received by praying for illumination, attending to it with the same diligence that we attend to our daily food, receiving it with faith and gratitude, treasuring it in our hearts, and practicing it in our lives.

**Q. 90. How do the Sacraments become effective for salvation?**

A. The Sacraments become effective for salvation by the working of the Holy Spirit and the blessing of Christ in those who receive them by faith, and not from any virtue or power inherent in them or in the one that administers them.

**Q. 91. What is a Sacrament?**

A. A Sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ during His earthly life in which, by visible and tangible signs of an invisible and intangible grace, Christ and the blessings of the New Covenant (New Testament) are portrayed, confirmed, and communicated to the hearts of believers.

**Q. 92. What are the Sacraments of the New Covenant (New Testament)?**

A. The Sacraments of the New Covenant are Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

**Q. 93. What is the Sacrament Baptism?**

A. Baptism is a pouring of water on the head, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. By the symbol of washing with water, it communicates and confirms to us the cleansing grace of God's forgiveness, and our belonging to the Lord and the family of God.

**Q. 94. Who should receive Baptism?**

A. Baptism should be received by all who come to faith in Jesus Christ and also by the children of believers, in accordance with the teaching of the Apostles and the words of Christ when He took a little child in His arms and declared that the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.

**Q. 95. What is the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?**

A. The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, is a receiving of bread and wine, according to Christ's command at the Last Supper, and by these symbols and the recollection of that night in which He was betrayed, His death is portrayed and receivers are by faith made partakers of His body and blood to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

**Q. 96. How is the Lord's Supper to be received?**

A. The Lord's Supper is to be received with faith and reverence, with sincere repentance for sins and a prayer for renewal, and taking care not to approach the table with irreverence and thereby provoking God's anger.

**Q. 97. What is prayer?**

A. Prayer is the communicating of our thoughts and desires to God, seeking all things according to His will, confessing our sins, praising Him, and thanking Him for His love, mercy, and salvation.

**Q. 98. What guidance has God given to us about prayer?**

A. The Word of God, the Psalms in particular, provide many worthy examples of prayer. The New Testament teaches us to pray in the name of Jesus, with faith and perseverance; and Christ taught His disciples to pray in the prayer commonly called "the Lord's Prayer."

**Q. 99. What does the beginning of the Lord's Prayer teach us?**

A. The beginning of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father who art in heaven," teaches us to draw near to God as children to a loving Father who is ever willing to help them, and also that we should pray with and for others.

**Q. 100. What do we pray for in the first petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the first petition, "Hallowed be Thy name," we pray that God would enable us, and others, to worship and glorify Him and that He would use all things for His glory.

**Q. 101. What do we pray for in the second petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the second petition, "Thy kingdom come," we pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed and that the Kingdom of Grace may be advanced, and that we and others may be brought into it and kept securely, and that the Kingdom of Glory may be hastened.

**Q. 102. What do we pray for in the third petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the third petition, "Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven," we pray that God, by His grace, would make us willing and able to know and do His will in all things, just as the angels always do in Heaven, and also we express our longing for His coming Kingdom of Glory when the earth shall be renewed and the meek shall inherit it.

**Q. 103. What do we pray for in the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the fourth petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," we pray that we may receive our portion of the good things in this life, and that we may enjoy His blessings with them.

**Q. 104. What do we pray for in the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the fifth petition, "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors," we pray that God would forgive our sins and that God would enable us, from the heart, to forgive others. We also acknowledge before God our rightful duty to forgive others, as a worshipful response to the mercy of God that is given to us in Christ and we acknowledge the offence to God's love that is created whenever we carry grudges or seek revenge against others.

**Q. 105. What do we pray for in the sixth petition of the Lord's Prayer?**

A. In the sixth petition, "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil," we pray that God would strengthen us against temptation and discouragement, and that His grace would give us victory over sin and the devil, for His glory and our salvation.

**Q. 106. What does the conclusion to the Lord's Prayer teach us?**

A. The conclusion of the Lord's Prayer, "For Thine is the Kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever," teaches us to seek encouragement from God above all else, and to praise Him and take joy in His Kingdom, power, and glory in all times and circumstances; and in testimony of our eagerness for His glory and our confidence in Him alone, we say, "Amen," which means, "May it ever be so."